



The Role of the Academic Library in Serving the Disadvantaged Student

E. J. JOSEY

AMONG THE MOST immediate and destructive of the problems facing the United States is the problem of the angry and restless poor community, including blacks, Puerto Ricans, poor whites, and Chicanos. These people feel helpless and powerless in the most affluent nation on the face of the globe. The largest group of disadvantaged American citizens that has moved into the large urban centers during the last decade is the black American. Usually he is relegated to the black ghetto where he feels powerless and excluded from the mainstream of American life. The plight of the black American citizen in the ghetto is one of being poverty stricken, undereducated, alienated, underemployed, unemployed, and not a part of the American dream. The poor black American lives in a segregated society in America; the Kerner Commission describes it as "two societies, one black, one white—separate and unequal."¹

Because of a multitude of factors, the disadvantaged American is plagued with many barriers which historically have prevented him from seeking higher education. There is no question that the overwhelming bulk of black, Puerto Rican, Appalachian white, and Chicano youths has been given grossly inadequate preparation in the public schools for college admission. Moreover, the overwhelming bulk of disadvantaged youth does not go on to college. The blacks, Puerto Ricans, poor whites and Chicanos who were successful and/or fortunate enough to complete high school had to endure the effects of familial economic factors, lack of proximity to higher educational institutions, lack of a positive impact of a good secondary school guidance program which would have encouraged them to seek higher education and

E. J. Josey is Chief, Bureau of Academic and Research Libraries, Division of Library Development, New York State Library, State Education Department, Albany.

The Academic Library

financial aid to attend college, the stigma of being in a lower socio-economic class which did not even consider college attendance, familial and community values and influences which did not encourage higher educational aspirations, and vocational goals which included attendance at institutions of higher education.

In spite of the many barriers preventing America's poor or disadvantaged from pursuing higher education, the author concurs with Birnbaum:

The poor communities, whatever their racial composition, are in desperate need of exactly what the colleges are in business to provide—the liberal and liberating experience of expanded learning; the various kinds of social and cultural experience and expertise that come with higher education; the specific skills and professional knowledge that can enable a young man or woman to overcome the effects of poverty and in turn help his community to combat them. The poor communities must have doctors, teachers, lawyers, skilled businessmen, capable public officials, and social scientists who have emerged from the community and know its problems firsthand. It is this direct link between knowledge and action, between the study of a problem and its practical solution, that both college and community desperately need.²

Until recently, in most institutions of higher education in the United States, there has been little or no firm commitment to recruit from the ranks of those who are socially and economically deprived; the educationally low-achieving students have been invisible and unacceptable to college recruiters. Following the riots in Watts, Newark, Detroit, and in many other cities across this land, many institutions of higher education reordered their priorities and began to recruit students from the ranks of the disinherited and poverty stricken. In short, it was not until after a massive domestic upheaval in our country that the nation's colleges and universities accepted, as a part of their educational responsibilities, the unfinished business of providing more educational opportunities for the disadvantaged blacks, Puerto Ricans, American Indians, Appalachian whites, and Chicanos. Many Americans were shocked in 1969 when John Egerton's report *State Universities and Black Americans*,³ sponsored jointly by the Southern Education Reporting Service and the National Association of State Universities and Land Grant Colleges, revealed that less than 2 percent of the students in the nation's state universities were Negroes. "The conclusion that black Americans are grossly underrepresented in higher education seems inescapable"⁴ and presents an inevitable challenge to American higher education.

One of the boldest and most imaginative programs established in the country to serve the disadvantaged student is the City University of New York's (CUNY) open admissions program. The following description gives a comprehensive sketch of the program:

Three months after the start of classes, City University of New York's open admissions program has achieved its basic objective, but is seriously hampered by crowding and shortages of space, its officials indicate.

The 16-campus university has lived up to its commitment of a year ago to provide spaces for all of the 1970 June graduates of the city's high schools who wished to attend its classes. It has done so in a bold departure from the past, when entrance was governed by the student's scholastic average and an examination score, and amid criticism that academic standards of the university would be corrupted by open admissions.

The influx of new students, including 9,000 from low academic and vocational high schools who would not have qualified for admission a year ago, has presented crushing problems. But after nearly three months, there is evidence that spirit is high among faculty, staff and students, and strikingly little criticism has appeared.

Many of the 35,500 entering freshmen in a student body of 190,000 are taking their classes in makeshift quarters. Although the university is in the midst of a huge building program, it has had to lease and convert mobile homes, storefronts, a supermarket, a synagogue, and former ice skating rink into classrooms.

Students study in telephone booths and are tutored in coatrooms, officials admit. Faculty members share offices or go without. Lounges have been converted into reading labs, and the Great Hall inside City College has been partitioned into rooms for teaching writing skills to the newcomers.

This sudden metamorphosis has created financial headaches, too. The University's budget has been strained by the entry of 15,500 more students than last year, and some \$11 million more is needed to meet expenditures this year, administrators have said. While the state has pledged some financial aid, negotiations were going on with city officials in November to seek funds to meet the balance of the deficit.

Open enrollment isn't that revolutionary—it's been a fixture at some big midwestern and California universities for some time. But City University's brand is unique. It stresses remedial and counseling programs, patterned after its experience of several years with SEEK (Search, Education and Elevation for Knowledge) and College Discovery, and aims directly at keeping the large number of new students from becoming dropouts.

Thus, special programs in reading, writing, and study skills are provided at each campus for those students needing help. University leaders say high school low achievers have proven well motivated to better themselves in similar programs in the past, and many have earned college degrees as a result.

SEEK and College Discovery, which attract promising youngsters to

The Academic Library

college, have expanded beyond the 2,700 students they enrolled last year. Classes are kept small and a counselor is available for each 50 students, a far better ratio than for the other students.

Last summer, candidates applying to City University were tested and screened, and most were able to enroll at the campus of their choice this September. Students not prepared for college work were earmarked for makeup work in reading, writing, and study skills, and some are taking one or more courses part-time. Over this semester they will be evaluated closely.

CUNY's network of community colleges (there are now seven) has taken many of these students. New standards of admission allow students with high school averages of 80 or better, or ranking in the top half of their classes, to enter the four-year colleges. Previously, CUNY had required an 85 average for admission to regular programs.

With tuition free, some students who would have gone to private colleges are enrolled in the city system. At the same time, private colleges and universities in the New York area now have more space than city campuses. The possibility of providing spaces for some slower students at these private colleges is being discussed, City University officials confirm, but the colleges must add remedial services and programs, and tuition support has not been worked out.

Deputy Chancellor Seymour Hyman said these proposals were "merely in the talking stage." At the same time, it didn't seem likely that City's space inadequacies would improve in the next two years, he noted.

He and Chancellor Albert H. Bowker are confident the system is educationally sound. Bowker was instrumental in moving open admissions ahead from 1975 to the current year. He insists that college degrees will not become watered down and no college credit will be given for non-college level work.

They have attracted outstanding new faculty and the same percentage of brighter students from the city's high schools as in the past to their program.

Among the unique features on the university's campuses this fall:

- Hunter College has opened a 24-hour student tutoring center, has a "buddy system" pairing upperclassmen with freshmen, and offers one or two-credit "mini-courses."

- City College has a tutoring service, too, employing graduate and undergraduate students.

- Queens College offers multiple courses in English, arts, sciences, and languages, and keeps classes going until 6 p.m.

- Teaching machines and computerized instruction have been added at each campus.

For the less qualified student, the program is "an open door, not a revolving door," university officials contend. It has changed the university from a center for those qualified on the basis of merit and income alone, to one offering higher education to all who think they can benefit.⁵

The open admissions program is working. Although there are glow-

ing accounts of this urban university's serious commitment, unfortunately nothing is indicated regarding the extent to which the libraries of CUNY are actually involved in the education of the disadvantaged. It is true that the Library Association of the City University of New York devoted its conference in April 1969 to the theme, "A New College Student: Challenge to City University Libraries." The question is, Has the conference theme been translated into meaningful action programs that will be helpful and useful to disadvantaged students who are now enrolled under the open admissions programs? At some of the colleges in CUNY programs have been undertaken, but at most of the units of CUNY, as is the case at most colleges and universities in America, little or nothing has been done to fashion a program of library service that would provide special library counseling, instruction, and reading guidance, while initiating programs that would reveal to disadvantaged students the importance of the academic library to success in college. It is imperative that creative and imaginative programs be launched that would motivate students from disadvantaged areas whose life styles have been void of books, reading, and libraries.

What programs should be initiated in college and university libraries to aid disadvantaged students who are now being enrolled in our nation's colleges and universities? The initial efforts, for a number of reasons, should be centered around creating a real learning environment in our college and university libraries. It must first be realized that our relationships and responsibilities to students are more direct than those to the faculty. Hence, it is important that librarians, whose primary duties would be working with the disadvantaged or high risk students, should be assigned to the staffs of all academic libraries which large numbers of disadvantaged students are using. The librarians who are assigned these important responsibilities must of necessity be persons who are able to empathize with the students. If possible, librarians from minority groups should be sought to handle this critical responsibility of helping these students to adjust to academic life as well as making them feel comfortable in a college or university library, which, in too many cases, is foreboding and repelling.

In addition to being endowed with the skills of good reference librarians and the ability to provide reading guidance, librarians who are assigned the task of working with disadvantaged students, who in all probability have not made extensive use of libraries, must be armed not with the typical "missionary" spirit of working *for* the poor and disinherited, but they must be able to transmit to these young people who

The Academic Library

are pursuing higher education a feeling and a spirit that they are working *with them* in their quest of a higher education. Young people from disadvantaged backgrounds are suspicious of those missionary zealots who come with an air of "I am going to save you from your wretched state." In short, there is a critical need for librarians who respect young people regardless of their socio-economic class, who are able to transcend cultural and economic barriers and who transmit to these young people the proper values and attitudes necessary for surviving in college as well as living in a highly complex society where continuing education will be necessary in order to avoid obsolescence. Instilling a love for learning through maximum utilization of library resources is best imbued in young disadvantaged students during their first semester in college by librarians who are sensitized to the educational and psychological needs of these young people who may be the first members of their families to pursue a college or university education.

At this point the reader may wish to challenge this thesis of providing suitably qualified and sensitized librarians by raising the question: Where will college and university libraries find librarians who possess the skills to do what this author described above? This is a legitimate question. While there may be an oversupply of librarians on the market in large urban centers, there is not an oversupply of librarians from minority groups. Hence, every library may not be able to procure the services of a librarian from a minority group. To solve this problem, academic library administrators, in making assignments in this area, may have to require that the staff members who will be responsible for working with high risk students take courses in guidance and counseling as well as courses relating to minorities in America. This preparation should provide the skill and expertise to allow librarians to perform adequately as librarian-counselors and faculty-librarians. The educational rationale for this procedure is that if the academic library is to become increasingly involved in the education of disadvantaged students, there must be competent staff who not only understand the complex nature of the problem of the undereducated who are now knocking on the doors of our colleges and universities, but who are committed to a program of action that will make the academic library a real educational tool for those who have been shortchanged by American society.

The second important thrust for preparing the academic library to handle efficiently disadvantaged students is the acquisition of a wide range of materials and resources. While competent library faculty are

essential in our nation's college and university libraries in order that the library can play a central role in the education of disadvantaged students, the academic library must become a total learning environment in which print, sound, and image all merge into sources of information for study and research. Huge quantities of books will always be basic to the learning environment, but it is imperative that the nation's college and university libraries begin to acquire and utilize non-book media which will contribute significantly to the education of disadvantaged students. Those students who have serious reading difficulties will not be penalized in a well stocked library of non-print materials. While these students are improving their reading skills in remedial courses, they will be able to continue their studies by making use of appropriate video tapes, cassettes, records, dial access capability, and other multi-media instruments.

Too many of our nation's college and university libraries are still book oriented. Although many of the disadvantaged students have reading problems, a large number of them have made use of films and other non-book materials. These students who have had some introduction to teaching machines and computerized instruction in high schools now must use staid academic libraries that do not use technological aids except for a few audiovisual materials. If more academic libraries were equipped with the new technology, academic libraries would contribute greatly to the improvement of learning for disadvantaged students. A report by Carl D. Perkins of the Commission on Instructional Technology to the Education and Labor Committee of the U. S. House of Representatives emphasizes increasing the capabilities of institutions of higher education, including libraries, in order to improve learning with the intelligent use of the new technologies.⁶

Non-print materials, while they will not replace the conventional book, will become increasingly important for academic library collections. Some librarians may immediately discern the value of using microform, micro-opaques, and other non-print resources for image storage and retrievals, but they seriously question the stress and emphasis upon the use of these materials at the expense of the revered Codex. The author's response to this kind of question is that the young people who are entering the colleges and universities in the decade of the 1970s have been reared on sight and sound; therefore, those of us in higher education must seize this opportunity to use the capabilities that these young people bring to college, i.e., the ability to learn in a multi-media environment. While these young people are viewing and listen-

The Academic Library

ing, it is the responsibility of the college and university libraries to aid them in overcoming their reading deficiencies.

Having generally made little use of public libraries and having attended high schools where libraries were poor, these young people did not develop their reading skills. A few years ago, the author made this statement which is still germane today:

Good school libraries are very important in the lives of disadvantaged youth, for most of their homes are void of books. Unfortunately, the parents of disadvantaged youth do not and/or cannot read. Consequently, these youth do not look favorably upon reading. In too many instances, newspapers and magazines are not in these children's homes, and the ordinary or commonplace habit of reading by parents is never witnessed by these youth. Never seeing his parents read will not motivate the disadvantaged youth to read.⁷

Therefore, it is quite apparent that by making use of sight and sound, librarians will be creating an equalization of opportunity for disadvantaged youth during the course of their college careers, while at the same time they will be remedying their reading disability.

In the development of library resources that will serve the disadvantaged student, it is essential that librarians grapple with the critical question that the author has alluded to above, the relevance of book and non-book resources.

Another important question facing academic libraries in establishing meaningful programs is: What is the best method and procedure to utilize in encouraging students from non-reading backgrounds to read? During the author's eleven years as the chief librarian of two predominantly black colleges, he used a library lecture series as a technique and invited nationally known authors to the campus, thereby inducing the students to read the books of these world-renown figures. Even if they had not read the works of the authors prior to their coming to the campus, they were usually motivated to read their works after having met and heard these scholars and writers. This may sound simplistic and unsophisticated to those who have worked primarily with college or university students who come from a middle class "prep" school background, but this method of introducing young minds from the ghetto to scholars and opinion-molders will not only have a salutary effect, but will certainly make readers out of non-readers.⁸

Disadvantaged students from the various ethnic groups will be encouraged to read books about their history, literature, leaders and folk heroes if academic libraries purchase books in these subject areas and

then make them freely accessible. The disadvantaged youth of Puerto Rican and Mexican-American background must have books in English and Spanish. Only a very few of the nation's academic libraries have bilingual collections for our citizens who possess fluency in their cultural tongue as well as in English. An important source of self-confidence and racial pride will be found in books and resources which will give ethnic disadvantaged students an appreciation of their own and other ethnic and cultural heritages.

In addition to providing resources that will entice young disadvantaged students to read, it is imperative that the librarians who work with disadvantaged students work hand in hand with the faculty, for the purpose of keeping abreast of curricular changes so that appropriate special reading lists, which may include pre-college reading materials, will be compiled and made available. Reading should not be the province of the remedial reading teacher; librarians working with disadvantaged students must make reading attractive to non-readers and thereby turn non-readers into readers. These youngsters who will go back to their ghetto communities as the future leaders of tomorrow must realize that reading is an irresistible medium of communication. Assisting disadvantaged students to become good readers will insure that open admissions will be "an open door, not a revolving door."

There are very few innovative practices, few departures from traditional librarianship, in use in college libraries as shown in a recent study⁹ by Forman. In working with the disadvantaged, college and university librarians must not be tied down to traditional concepts of library service. A personalized service that the academic library could offer is the creation of tutorial services in the library. Seminar rooms and conference rooms could be converted into tutorial centers where honor students and faculty could help students develop proper study techniques and attitudes. The tutorial centers could be under the direction of the librarian-counselor who has the special assignment of working with disadvantaged students. Large numbers of students who need either remedial help or enrichment would benefit by studying in the library where all types of materials will be available to aid them in their quest for educational opportunity.

While most academic libraries rarely provide selective dissemination of information (SDI) for their honor students, nevertheless, this is a technique in which bold, imaginative experimentation could be instituted. The effectuation of such a program might begin by creating a

The Academic Library

profile, including vocational goals and even remediation needs, on the interests of a small group of students. One would not have to utilize computer application for this service. Here again honor students and service-oriented fraternities and sororities, under the guidance of librarians, could be pressed into service; volunteers from these student groups could scan the indices for serial literature, the new bookshelves, and new non-print acquisitions and match the resources with the needs of the disadvantaged students.

There have been many wide ranging proposals for reforming higher education. Many of these reforms will aid disadvantaged students. A study group of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, the Assembly on University Goals and Governance, recently recommended that:

institutions create joint, racially integrated pre-college and pre-professional programs to prepare low-income youth for the college education that is often denied them now. . . . Institutions should also try giving students credit for important work experience or independent study off the campus in the school year. . . . The role of colleges and universities as "gatekeeper"—granting "passports to employ"—is "onerous". . . . "Every innovation that reduces the pressure on colleges and universities to accommodate all, including those who are not interested or able—and that reinforces an element of choice on the part of the individual—is desirable."¹⁰

The assembly also recommended "intermingling study and work" which will be useful to students with low incomes.

The suggestions for reform by the assembly of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, as well as the external degree proposed by Ewald B. Nyquist, president of the University of the State of New York and Commissioner of Education, in his inaugural address¹¹ on September 15, 1970, are indicators that disadvantaged Americans will have easier access to the coveted degree in an informal educational setting. Will the academic libraries cope with these new programs? Americans who participate in informal higher educational programs will certainly make use of public libraries, but the National Advisory Commission on Libraries described the sorry state of affairs relative to the strength of public library collections by stating that "more than two thirds of all public libraries fail to meet American Library Association (ALA) standards as to the minimum adequate size of collections."¹² In view of the foregoing, it will be necessary that students engaged in informal higher education programs be provided with resources largely housed in academic libraries. If the students are studying on their own without the benefit of a professor, or have limited or no contact with an educational

institution, they will need academic libraries. Hence, academic libraries should begin serving young adults who may or may not have affiliation with their parent institutions.

The new programs and especially the external degree program will provide a ready solution for those citizens in the low income bracket who are not able to give up their employment and return to college on a full-time basis to acquire a college education. The external degree offers immense possibilities for bringing flexibility, as well as greater democratic quality, into higher education, for it will be impartially available to all citizens regardless of age, race, sex or economic status, thus giving hope to thousands of disadvantaged American citizens. Will our academic libraries seize the opportunity to provide counseling, instruction and resources to the thousands of people who will take this route to a coveted college degree?

Finally, it is inevitable that academic librarians will reach the conclusion that the academic library has a positive role in serving the disadvantaged student. The author has indicated that to serve the disadvantaged students a new type of staff member is necessary in academic libraries, i.e., one who empathizes and works with the students. Another important requisite is the assemblage of a wide range of resources to include non-print materials which will equalize the learning opportunities. Of equal importance will be the establishment of programs to encourage a love for reading. Furthermore, there is a need to engage in innovative practices to aid disadvantaged students. It should also be emphasized that academic libraries must open their doors to adults who are studying in the newly emerging and less formal educational programs, such as the external degree program.

If the academic library is to have a modicum of success in reaching disadvantaged students, it must become a teaching agency offering aid to the disadvantaged with action-oriented programs such as those outlined above. Academic librarians must become more than user oriented. In short they must become client centered by making students who have never used libraries feel at home in the library. This client-centered policy does not have to be confined to the walls of the library. The academic library must become a library without walls with librarian-counselors visiting the student union and other places where students gather on campus in order to make students aware of the informational and instructional services that await them in the library. The academic library must reach disadvantaged students *through* ac-

The Academic Library

tion-oriented library programs and not merely by teaching *about* the library.

The academic library can provide disadvantaged students with many new kinds of learning experiences by providing high quality staff, a wide range of resources and facilities, and meaningful programs that will involve students in the critical analysis of the social values and interactions that underlie the foundations of education. This can be accomplished by an academic library for disadvantaged students, but if it is to be successful, a high priority must be placed on inquiry and problem-solving which utilize library resources; the focus would be on giving these young people confidence in themselves which in turn will help them learn and will inculcate in them that they have a magnificent contribution to make to society. Such positive programs by academic libraries can engender a social commitment that will have a lasting effect on those who will begin their college careers as the disadvantaged but who will leave the halls of academe with an enduring commitment to help establish a more democratic society for America and all of her citizens.

References

1. U. S. National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders. *Report*. Washington, D.C., U.S.G.P.O., 1968, p. 1.
2. Educational Facilities Laboratories. *A College in the City: An Alternative*. Prepared by William M. Birenbaum. New York, 1968, p. 1.
3. Egerton, John. *State Universities and Black Americans: An Inquiry into Desegregation and Equity for Negroes in 100 Public Universities*. Atlanta, Southern Education Foundation, 1969.
4. Rosenbaum, David E. "Study Finds State Universities Lag in Enrollment of Negroes," *New York Times*, May 18, 1969, p. 1, col. 2.
5. "CUNY Open Admissions: Enrollment Plan is Working but Space for Classrooms is Seriously Short," *Inside Education*, 57:2-3, Dec. 1970.
6. U. S. Congress. House. Education and Labor Committee. *To Improve Learning, Report to the President and Congress by the Commission on Instructional Technology*. Washington, D.C., U.S.G.P.O., 1970.
7. Josey, E. J. "Reading and the Disadvantaged," *The Negro History Bulletin*, 28:156, April 1965.
8. ———. *The Black Librarian in America*. Metuchen, N.J., Scarecrow Press, 1970, p. 307.
9. Forman, Sidney. "Innovative Practices in College Libraries," *College & Research Libraries*, 29:486-92, Nov. 1968.
10. Farber, M. A. "Panel Calls on Colleges to Give Adults Easier Access to Programs," *New York Times*, Jan. 17, 1971, p. 38, cols. 3-4.

E. J. JOSEY

11. Nyquist, Ewald B. *The Idea of the University of the State of New York; Some Facts and Issues*. Albany, The University of the State of New York, 1970, pp. 6-8.

12. U. S. National Advisory Commission on Libraries. *Library Services for the Nation's Needs: Toward Fulfillment of a National Policy; Report*. Washington, D.C., Dept. of Health, Education and Welfare, Office of Education, 1968, p. 24.